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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the effects of art expression on self-concept of low-reading first-grade students. Subjects, five low-readers and five on- or above-grade-level first graders from central Virginia, were pretested for self-concept, instructed in a two-week art-book making intervention, and posttested with the same instrument. Results indicated that the increase in low-readers' self-concept was not significant. Further research with changes in the small sample size, short intervention period, and the testing instrument is recommended. (Contains 19 references. The self-concept instrument and an appendix of data are attached.) (RS)

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Effects of Art Expression on Self-concept of Low Reading First Grade Students

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EFFECTS OF ART ON SELF-CONCEPT

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Abstract

This study investigates the effects of art expression on self-concept of low reading first grade students. Existing research indicates a reciprocal effect between reading achievement andself-concept; and many studies find that participation in an arts based program increases the self-concept and standard achievement of low achieving students. Ten first graders from Central Virginia, five low readers and five on or above grade level, made up the test group. Subjects were pre-tested for self-concept, taught a two-week art-book making intervention,and post-tested with the same instrument. The hypothesis predicted that the self-concept of low readers would increase after the intervention. The results find that the increase in low readers' self-concept was not signigicant. The experimenter states small sample size, short intervention period, and testing instrument as possible influences on the results, and recommends that further research be done on the topic with changes in these factors.

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I. Statement of Problem

A. Need for Study

Even as current remedial reading programs, such as Chapter I services and reading recovery help improve reading and writing levels of students, literacy is still a major problem. The remedial programs now in place should be continued and strengthened, however there is a need for a new perspective in the general education classroom. As low readers fall further and further behind each year they face ever increasing failure. Research shows that these low readers also have low self-concept. Each effort to learn to read becomes a risk to self-concept. Therefore this study, based on Gardner's multiple intelligences theory, seeks to increase the self-concept of low readers through success in an alternate mode of intelligence -- art. After gains in self-concept these students may have the confidence to risk more of themselves in learning to read.

B. Purpose

The purpose of the study was to determine the effects of a two week art-book making intervention

program on self-concept of ten first graders, five delayed in reading and five on or above grade level.

C. Hypothesis

Self-concept of first grade low readers will be increased after a two-week wordless art-book making intervention program.

II. Review of Related Literature

A. Introduction and Definitions

There has been an abundance of research conducted on the reciprocal relationship between achievement and self-concept. Research has shown that when a student achieves poorly her/is self-concept will be lowered, and in turn when she heads into new tasks with a low self-concept she will not try as hard or expect success and will achieve even more poorly. This is a vicious cycle of low self-concept and low achievement. However, there is a flip side to this cycle. A high achiever will gain a high self-concept and in turn achieve even more. This could be called the wonderful cycle of high self-concept

and high achievement. This review will look at the many studies showing support for the reciprocal effects of self-esteem and achievement.

Self-concept, as defined by Shavelson(1981), is a person's perceptions of him- or herself formed through experience with and interpretations of one's environment and influenced especially by reinforcements, evaluations by significant others, and one's attributions for one's own behavior. Shavelson, Marsh, and Byrne(1988) reported that academic self-concept is not the simple single concept once thought, but has many facets related to different areas of learning. Purkey(1984, 29) stated that, "...self-concept is a complex, continuously active system of subjective beliefs about personal existence. It serves to guide behavior and to enable each individual to assume particular roles in life." He explained that the development of self-concept continues throughout a person's life and his/her experiences constantly modify the self-concept.

B. Reciprocal Effects of Achievement & Self-concept

1. General achievement

For a reciprocal effect to exist it must be shown that achievement affects self-concept and that self-concept affects achievement. Trent(1986) found that

academic achievement and self-concept were positively related in kindergarten students. Several studies have found that reading achievement and self-concept are positively related (Clayton, 1979; Vereen, 1980; and Clawson, 1987). There is also evidence that self-concept influences achievement. The research of Zimmerman and Allebrand(1965) demonstrated that poor readers with a low self-concept actively avoided achievement. Mufson, Cooper, and Hall(1989) found in their study of 28 seventh grade students that the underachieving students had lower self-concept and were less hard working than other students. Two studies found self-concept to be predictive of later success or failure. Bridgeman, Brent, and Shipman(1978) used preschool measures of self-esteem as indicators of third grade achievement. Wattenberg and Clifford found that measures of self-concept taken in kindergarten proved significantly predictive of second grade progress in reading. Finally, several researchers specifically addressed the reciprocal effects of self-concept and achievement. Artley(1977) described a vicious circle of low reading achievement and self-concept. Revicki(1981) also found a reciprocal effect to exist between self-concept and achievement of second graders. Purkey(1970)

indicated that there is a continuous interaction between self-concept and achievement and that each directly influences the other.

2. Reading achievement

More specifically, many studies have shown that there is a direct relationship between reading achievement and self-concept. If a student has a positive self-concept, the chances for normal developmental reading growth are good. The studies of both Claytor(1979) and Vereen(1980) found a positive relationship between reading achievement and self-concept in fifth graders. Clawson(1987) found that even by kindergarten and first grade self-concept was already significantly positively related to reading achievement.

Achievement in reading may have more of an effect on self-concept than in other areas because it is valued almost to the exclusion of other abilities in the traditional classroom. Revicki(1982) reported that the reciprocal effect between self-concept and achievement was considerably stronger for the sub-category of reading achievement. Cook(1988, 4) stated, "A child who has problems in reading is constantly `risking' his/her self-concept. Because reading permeates the entire curriculum, learning to read is vital and not succeeding

at it can result in hopelessness, frustration, and negative self-concept".

According to self-concept theory, the obvious way to increase reading achievement is to allow for success and improvement in reading to improve reading self-concept and further achievement. However, trying to succeed in reading one more time when the child has a past history of failure may present such a big risk to the child that she will not attempt reading again.

A second way to look at the problem is to emphasize other modes of intelligence as being of value and allowing for achievement in these non-traditional modes of learning. When a low reader has success in another area her self-concept will increase and this may give her the confidence to take the risk of reading.

C. Effects of Art Expression on Self-concept

1. Multiple intelligences

Gardner(1983) provided evidence for multiple intelligences. These include, but are not limited to, linguistic, logico-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, and personal intelligences. In detailing the history of our views on intelligence, he explained how the overriding thought on intelligence over the last two-thousand years was based on two modes:

verbal and logico-mathemetical. This has vastly impacted on education and can be seen in intelligence tests, standardized achievement tests, and the structure of our schools. However, with the emergence of left-brain, right-brain research, additional areas of intelligence and modes of thinking began to gain acceptance. People have varying degrees of ability in each of the areas of intelligence. Unfortunately schools still pivot around verbal and logico-mathematical thinking, giving little attention or value to other intelligences. Therefore, when a student is low in verbal but high in spatial or musical intelligence she/he may end up going through school with low self-concept because reading was all that counted. Williams(1983) explained the great disadvantages of a school program that depends on verbal intelligence as a mode of learning and expression to the exclusion of other intelligences In such a program, "students who are less proficient at verbal processes are required to learn in as manner that is unnecessarily difficult for them and are thus unable to function at their full potential. Their more verbal classmates may appear to be learning very well, but they are getting little or no help in developing and using right-hemisphere thinking.

Since these processes are essential to problem solving and creativity, their omission is a serious loss,"(Williams, 7).

Giving students a chance to succeed in an alternate mode of intelligence increases their self-concept and has been found additionally to increase achievement in other academic areas. All facets of intelligence should be given attention in school as ways to present or acquire information, subject matters in their own right, and ways of expressing and assessing learning. The present study looks at work in the arts, particularly visual art, as a way to increase self-concept and thus achievement.

2. Evidence of arts increasing self-concept and achievement

The literature points to arts as a way to increase self-concept through opportunity for self expression and learning in a non-traditional mode of intelligence which may be a student's strength. Karen Gallas(1991), said that an integrated arts curriculum provides a range of arts experiences that will offer all children ways to communicate their new knowledge because the arts call on many modes of intelligence from kinetic to spatial to musical to personal to verbal. The arts can not be

limited to a hour a week pull-out program or a separate lesson at the end of the day. Gallas (1991, 40)pointed out that what made the positive difference for her first grade students was, "the presence of the arts as an integral part of their curriculum: as a methodology for acquiring knowledge, as subject matter, and as an array of expressive opportunities,". Goldberg (1992) explained that self-expression is intertwined with knowing, even when what you know can not be expressed with words. Goldberg(1992, 623) advocated assessing through the arts because, "by restricting students to traditional means of expression- and thus teachers to traditional means of evaluation- teachers may be preventing these students from fully working with and displaying their knowledge."

Many innovative arts programs have found that working in the arts increases students' achievement in non-art areas of school as well as in the arts. Dean and Gross(1992) described Learning through an Expanded Arts Program(LEAP) as a program that started as an art and music program for the gifted but has been extended to all students in New York City over the last twelve years. The program taught basic skills through the arts and had particular success with students who test below

the 15th percentile in reading and math. The project directors attributed the success to two factors, "first, the materials and projects are intrinsically interesting to students and make learning an exciting experience. Second, the sense of accomplishment that comes from the completion of a creative task helps students develop self-confidence and self-esteem,"(Dean & Gross, 614). Hanna(1992) made a case for the relationship of arts education to academic achievement in citing the following examples. St. Augustine School, in the South Bronx, was about to close due to lack of enrollment until it became St. Augustine School of the Arts, as a result of which enrollment soared and 98% of the students met New York State academic standards. Academic achievement rose after the implementation of arts programs in Los Angeles and in Sampson County, North Carolina. The 1987, 1988, and 1989 profiles compiled by the College Board showed that students who took art courses had higher SAT scores than those who did not. The ArtsConnection "Young Talent Dance Program" for third through sixth graders in ten New York City schools has found over the last 16 years that:

> participating youngsters feel an increased sense of specialness, capability, achievement, and empowerment to make changes in their lives;

> they acquire self-discipline and new learning strategies; their attendance improves.....they are willing to `work hard' and complete tasks; [and] their academic achievement, as measured by standardized reading and math tests, is equal to or better than that of their peers (Hanna, 603).

Several authors suggest art programs to increase reading and writing achievement. McGuire(1984) cited Lidstone's research findings that after five months in an arts program, students who had been two to five years below reading level were on grade level. Deeds(1981) stated that success in an area which a child highly rates will increase self-confidence in other areas. Therefore, a reading program should capitalize on students' strengths in areas such as art.

Art should not be considered less legitimate than verbal expression, indeed it is actually another mode of expression; a language which uses images rather than words to communicate. Boyer(1986, 29) , former U. S. Commissioner of Education, explained that the arts must be central to education, " because the arts represent language at its very best,". Eisner(1988) , professor of Education and Art at Stanford University, commented on art as a language,"our culture is replete with a variety of forms of representation because humans have

found it necessary to invent such forms in order to express what they want to convey,". Just as gaining fluency in a foreign verbal language can increase one's understanding of her/is native tongue, gaining fluency in art expression can increase understanding of verbal expression. Arnheim(1989) in his essay explained that, " the studio practice of art can be directly helpful to someone coping with compositional problems in entirely different areas. Students struggling with the problem of how to organize a large piece of writing...might be substantially helped by learning to organize a piece of sculpture or a painting or by studying compositions created by artists,".

III. Design of the Study

A. Sample

The sample consisted of ten first grade students, five delayed in reading and five on or above grade level. There were three boys and two girls in each ability level. Each ability level had one African-American, one Hispanic-American, and three European-American students. All students were seven years old

except for one who was repeating first grade and was eight years old.

B. Measures

A measurement instrument was created by the experimenter. It listed a variety of subject areas: math; writing; drama; art; climbing, jumping, and throwing; reading; music; P. E. ; telling stories; science; making things; and other. Each was followed by a smiling face and a frowning face. The instrument was administered individually to ensure understanding and avoid peer influence of responses. The following directions were read to each student:

> Write your name on the line.... Everyone has some things they are good at doing and other things they are not good at doing. I'll read each of these subjects to you from the list. If I read a subject you are good at circle the smiling face. If I read one you are not good at circle the frowning face. do you understand?

then each subject was read and the student circled his/her responses. For the last item students were asked if there was anything they are good at or not good at that was not listed. A sample of the test is included. See Appendix A.

C. Design

The design of the study was to pre-test students, teach an intervention consisting of a two week wordless art-book making unit, and then post-test students with the same instrument. Differences between pre-test and post-test results were used to determine effects of the intervention.

The intervention was based on a unit developed by the experimenter adapting Calkin's writing process approach to visual art expression.

The writing process encourages student input and creativity by focusing on the natural process of creating a written work, rather than traditional methods which are formulaic and product driven. The process is an on going cycle which includes rehearsal or prewriting, drafting, revision, sharing, editing, and publishing. Only a small percentage of work will end up going through the whole process and being published. The form this takes on in the classroom is the writing workshop.

The intervention was modeled after this and was an art workshop. Different students were at different parts of the process at any given moment but all were working towards creating a wordless art book of their own. The rehearsal stage took place with students

binding their own sketchbooks the first day and using these throughout the unit to brainstorm visual ideas, experiment, and practice. Some drafting and revision took place in the sketchbooks or in works on large paper. The process was facilitated by daily "critiques" -or sharing of works in progress- with the class in a group discussion. Finally each student developed an idea for a book and submitted a proposal. After that they were busy drawing, painting, and binding their books. To celebrate the creations they were displayed at Parents' Night.

D. Analysis

The percentage of positive responses out of total responses before the intervention was compared to that after the intervention for each reading ability level and for the entire group

IV. Analysis of Results

The percentage of positive responses out of total responses for low readers had a statistically insignificant increase of 87.3% before to 88.9% after the intervention. The high readers' percentage of positive responses remained the same at 93.4%. Overall,

the entire group increased from an average of 90.3% to 91.1%. See chart in Appendix B.

The hypothesis reads: Self-concept of first grade low readers will be increased after a two-week wordless art-book making intervention program. The results indicated no significant difference between the self-concept of the low readers before and after the intervention.

V. Conclusions

The study finds no significant difference between the self-concept of low readers from before to after the art-book making intervention. There are several possible factors that might have influenced the results.

The sample size was small. Only ten first grade students were included in the study. As well, the intervention was quite brief. It took place for an hour a day for two weeks. This is a total of ten hours, not a very long time compared to the hundreds of other hours spent in school. Third, the students all showed a high self-concept before the intervention started. This may be the result of previous influences in home and school, or because the testing instrument did not measure self-

concept accurately. As a result of budget restraints, the testing instrument was designed by the experimenter rather than using a commercially available test of self-concept. The instrument was not tested for reliability or accuracy and therefore it is not known if the instrument is a valid measure of self-concept. Finally, before and during the intervention there were outside influences on self-concept from home, peers, and school. In future research the experimenter recommends using a larger sample for a longer period of time and that a commercially available testing instrument be used to measure self-concept.

Although the study did not find significant results, the research cited in the literature review indicates that using art expression with low readers and all students to increase self-concept is still a worthwhile goal to pursue.

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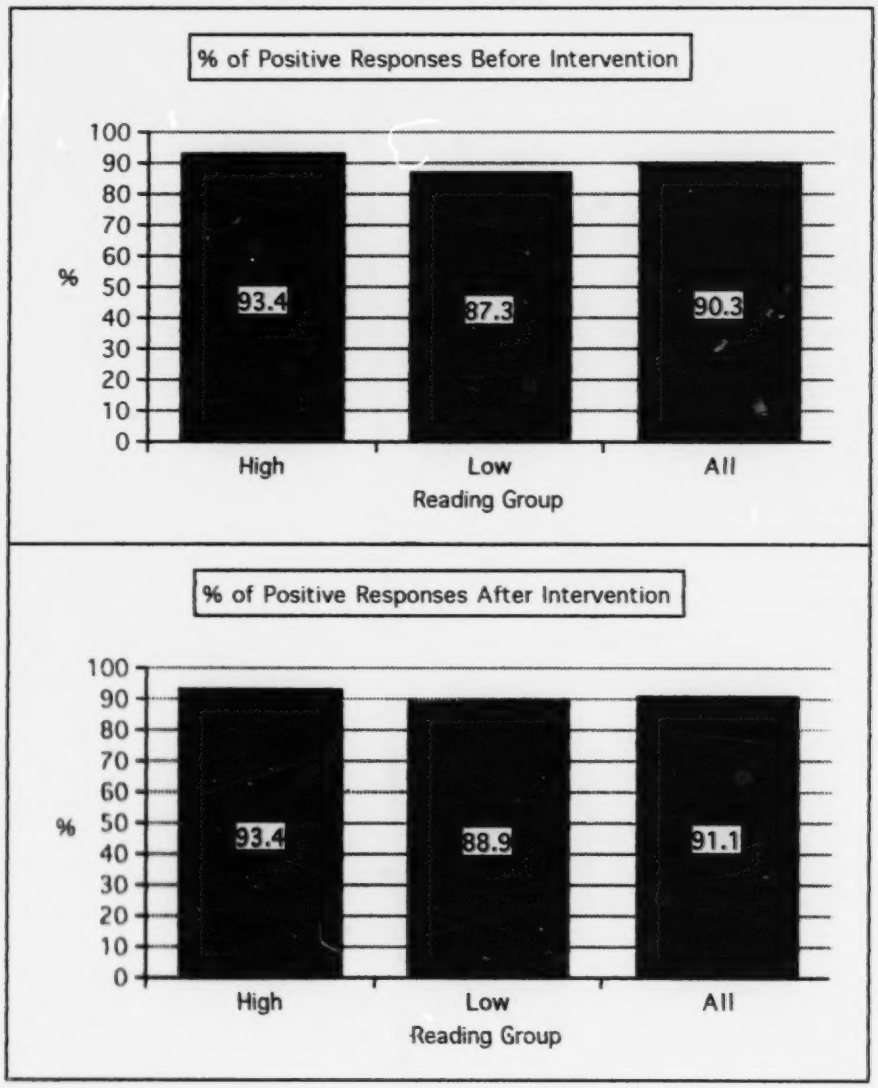
Appendix A

math		
writing		
drama		
art		
climbing, jumping and throwing		
reading		
music		
p.e.		
telling stories		
science		
making things		
other _____		

A

Appendix B



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